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24-Hour Cities Network: Policy and strategy recommendations

POLICY PAPER

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Author:**Andreina Seijas**Resident expert,
24-Hour Cities Network

Introduction: Why a 24-Hour Cities Network?

Often linked to crime, nuisance and antisocial behavior, the night has traditionally been seen as a negative space that must be restricted and hyper regulated. However, in our modern 24-hour world, city life doesn't stop when the sun goes down. Urban economies keep producing, city services continue to function, and cultural activities energize the night.

"City life doesn't stop when the sun goes down. Urban economies keep producing, city services continue to function and cultural activities energize the night."

Over the past 15 years, cities began to adopt a proactive approach to managing this part of the day. Led by Amsterdam and Berlin, by 2020 there were more than 40 local governments around the world that had appointed **"night mayors"** or specialized offices responsible for maintaining nocturnal vibrancy while mediating between those who wish to work, party or sleep (Seijas and Gelders, 2020). These new institutions helped consolidate the field known as **nighttime policy and planning**, which draws from many disciplines such as urban planning, urban design, data sciences, mobility, social sciences and economic development, just to name a few.

Some of the earliest contributions of this new field are from an institutional perspective. Night mayors and advocates started to experiment with new ways to distribute nighttime activity more efficiently across cities, and with new institutional arrangements that could help de-escalate violence and crime in highly concentrated nightlife areas. This is the case in Amsterdam, where the city successfully implemented a program that involves young hosts dressed in bright red jackets who patrol Rembrandtplein, one of the city's main nightlife districts, at night. Between 2015 and 2018, these square hosts achieved a 20% drop in alcohol-related violence, as well as 28% fewer nuisance reports (Borise, 2022).



Left: Amsterdam square hosts. Right: Les Pierrots de la Nuit, an association of performers responsible for implementing mediation and advisory actions to prevent noise disturbances around nightlife activities in Paris.

"COVID-19 motivated both a shift and a surge of interest in the nighttime economy."

With night mayors in London, Paris, New York and more than a dozen other U.S. cities, by 2020, the night was becoming increasingly recognized in urban agendas. However, COVID-19 motivated both a shift and a surge of interest in the topic. Aside from tourism and international travel, the sectors most-affected by the pandemic were culture, nightlife and hospitality, which were deemed as "non-essential" and rely heavily on agglomerations and group gatherings. Most cities around the world witnessed how their nightlife and cultural institutions such as theaters and museums shut down completely for at least two full months. Additionally, local authorities banned large gatherings, including conferences, sports events, culture and music festivals in the interest of public health.

Given the relevance of nightlife, culture and hospitality for the economy of cities, institutional responses quickly began to emerge:

- Vienna's Club Commission was among the first to post a message on its Instagram account to announce that they were working with nonprofit organization Music Austria to gather information for nightclubs and event organizers to lessen the negative impact of this crisis over their operations (Vienna Club Commission, 2020).
- The New York City Hospitality Alliance produced a 12-point "mitigation and support plan" for the city's nightlife industry, which included providing rent and tenant protections, granting no-interest loans to businesses, and capping third-party delivery fees that are not profitable for restaurants (New York City Hospitality Alliance, 2020).
- Berlin's Clubcommission set up a task force to guide clubs and promoters through this difficult period (Hawthorn, 2020).
- On March 14, 2020, global advocacy group VibeLab launched nighttime.org, an online portal to share and centralize information about how the spread of COVID-19 was affecting the nightlife industry. In order to get a global perspective of city responses, the group created a WhatsApp chat where night advocates from all over the world could share live updates on the measures taken by their cities to both contain the outbreak and assist nightlife and hospitality businesses.

In many cities, night mayors became important allies to disseminate social distancing guidelines, promote business compliance and gather data on the impact of these measures over nighttime activity. These conversations led to the creation of the **Global Nighttime Recovery Plan (GNRP)**, a collaborative guide for cities that were trying to determine the best way to design and execute safe and feasible strategies to reactivate their creative and nighttime economies. The GNRP consists in a series of seven chapters that gather examples and best practices from more than 70 cities all over the world. These chapters are the product of a joint effort that involved more than 130 practitioners, academics, public health experts, advocates and industry representatives.¹



Global Nighttime Recovery Plan

In this context of collaboration towards the reactivation of nighttime ecosystems is that **City Possible's 24-Hour Cities Network** was born. In November 2021, a session titled "Building 24-Hour Cities" took place at the Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona and brought together experts from two cities that were making remarkable efforts to get their nighttime economies back on track. The City of New York and Bogotá, Colombia became co-chairs of this global initiative to bring together city leaders and other stakeholders to share ideas to address the challenges that cities face at night and ensure the world's city economies can flourish around the clock (Mastercard newsroom, 2022).

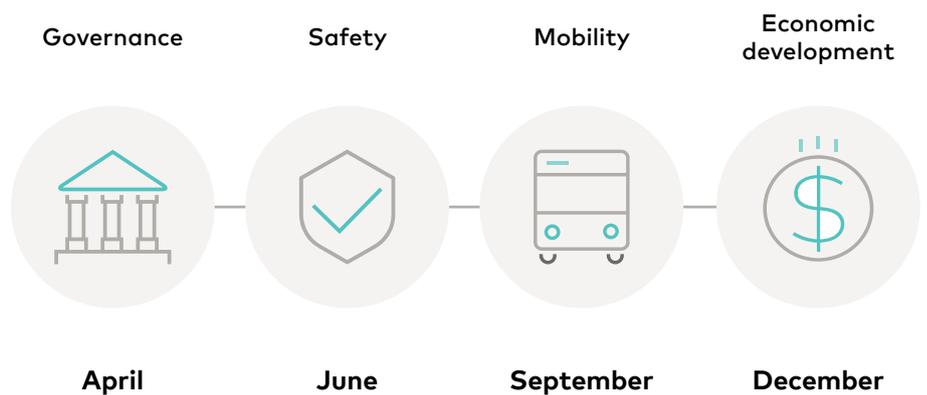
2. [Learn more and download the Nighttime recovery plan](#)



Building 24-Hour Cities at the Smart City Expo World Congress, 2021

Like New York and Bogotá, other cities have become increasingly aware of the need to create strategies and set policies that support vibrant nighttime economies that ensure cities are as safe, prosperous, inclusive and enjoyable at night as they are during the day. Between March and December 2022, the 24-Hour Cities Network gathered international leaders, experts and activists to share best practices on nighttime policy and planning.

Given the broad scope of this field, the network's convenings were structured around four main topics: governance, safety, mobility and economic development:



Each workshop consisted of a two-hour online session (via Zoom) and gathered speakers and attendees from more than 50 cities:



Workshop attendees came from more than 50 cities across 21 countries

The diversity of themes and actors involved in these conversations revealed that nighttime planning and governance is not only gaining increasing attention from city leaders, but that it's a topic that's here to stay. The following sections will summarize the main takeaways from each of these sessions and provide some recommendations and lessons learned from this global community of researchers, activists and night mayors that are shaping the way we plan and design our cities after dark.



60+

cities around the world have appointed people to govern nightlife

Nighttime governance

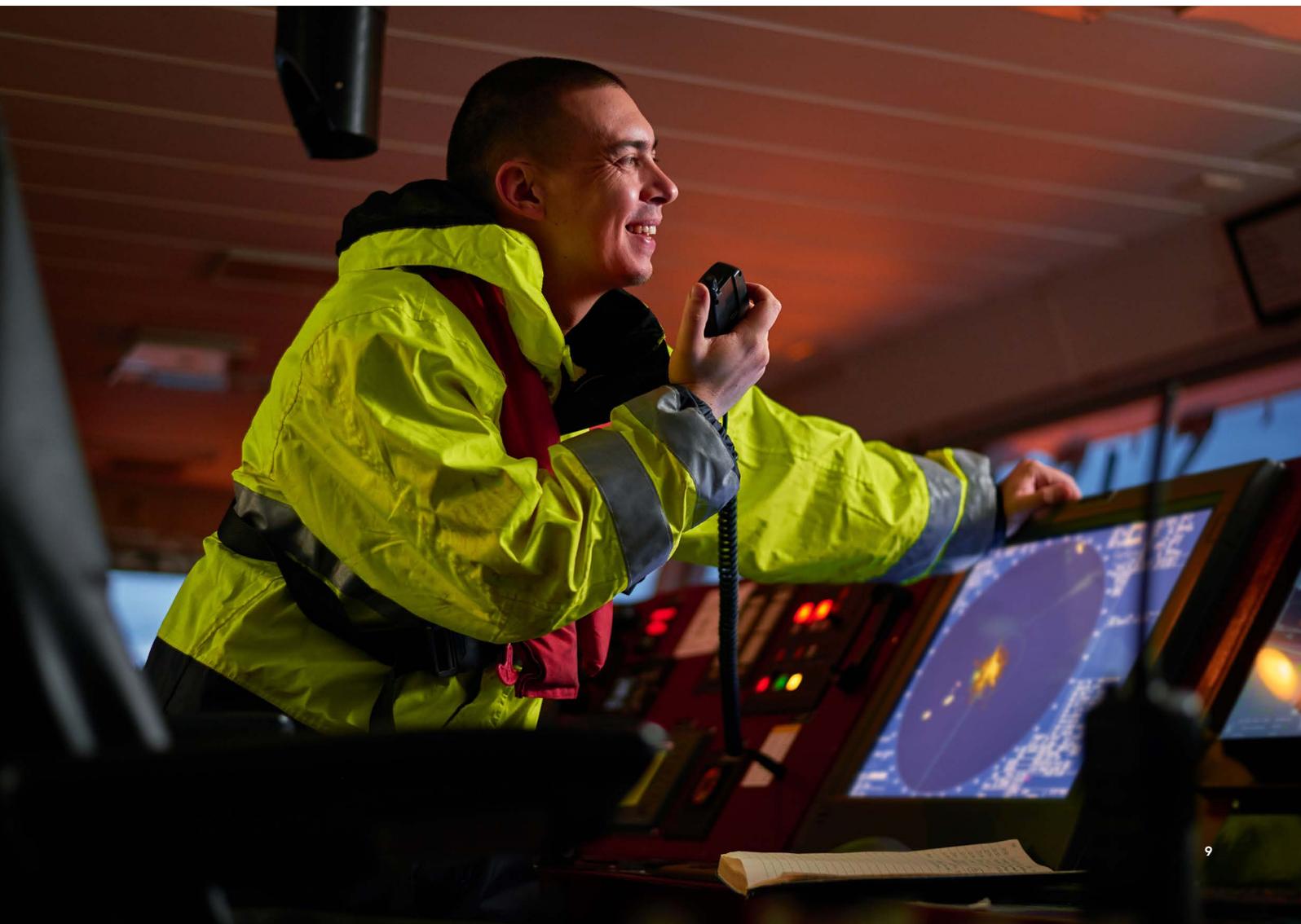
Urban governance is the process through which different actors in the public and private sectors collaborate to manage cities. When brought into the context of running cities at night, this urban governance principle remains the same.

Some takeaways from this session:

- **Efficient nighttime management does not require reducing the hours and restricting the locations of nighttime activity.** Some cities like Amsterdam have experimented with 24-hour permits that encourage nightlife and cultural venues to open round the clock when located outside of the city's busy and highly residential core. Introducing staggered closing times also facilitates managing large crowds of people in areas that have a high concentration of licensed venues, as well as providing safe and convenient mobility options to take them home.
- **More police presence does not always equal more safety.** There is an increasing number of institutions, mediators, volunteers and neighborhood groups involved in managing the city at night. Some of these actors are trade organizations, best-practice schemes and accreditations, square guardians, and local pacts and agreements. A recent addition to this cast is the role of "night mayors", who are individuals and teams responsible for governing nightlife and facilitating its harmonious coexistence with other uses, particularly in increasingly mixed and gentrified urban areas. More than 60 cities around the world have now appointed these roles.²

2. An online interactive map of night mayors and nighttime advocacy organizations is available [here](#).

- **The night is more than party time.** Thinking of the nighttime solely in terms of partying takes away from the night's vibrancy and keeps decision-makers from formulating the best nighttime governance strategies. Nighttime planning also involves other economic activities such as creative industries, call centers, healthcare services, caregiving, airports and the distribution of goods and services that takes place after dark.
- **Nighttime governance models can take many shapes and variations.** While some cities like London or New York have created official teams responsible for coordinating nighttime plans and resources, others like Amsterdam or Berlin follow a more independent model where temporarily appointed ambassadors are responsible for implementing a nighttime strategy. Other cities have created city-wide councils or commissions to incorporate city-wide views and interests into the mix. And others, like Paris, have a combination of these approaches: an official representative and a city-wide *Conseil de la Nuit*.





69%

of women over 18 years old in Mexico report that they feel unsafe when walking alone at night

Nighttime safety

Urban dwellers experience and interact differently in night spaces. Nighttime safety is a multi-dimensional concept that calls for all city stakeholders, residents, businesses and government, to work together to take advantage of the many opportunities to work, play and connect that exist after dark.

Some takeaways from this session:

- **Gender-sensitive policies and design are key to creating inclusive nocturnal cities.** Basic differences in the way women and men interact in social spaces condition their nocturnal experience but are often disregarded in urban planning and design. In Mexico, 69% of women over 18 years old report that they feel unsafe when walking alone at night.* The country's Urban Development Secretariat has recently published a guide with recommendations for more inclusive planning.³ Other cities are promoting local and regional initiatives to protect people who feel vulnerable in bars or nightclubs by allowing them to discreetly report their situation. This is the case of the Ask for Angela program in London⁴ and SHINE, a project led by the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS) and currently implemented in Paris.⁵
- **Nighttime workers are more vulnerable than other groups and require specialized policies to address their unique needs.** Autonomy, a U.K.-based think tank, issued a report that proposed six ideas to support these workers:
 1. Establish night work assemblies.
 2. Create a night workers equity commission.
 3. Build a community-centered framework for governing local nighttime economies.
 4. Enforce a nighttime living wage.
 5. Establish night funds to leverage resources for public-commons partnerships.
 6. Move toward community-based frameworks for policing at night.⁶

3. The guide (in Spanish) is available [here](#).
 4. More information about this program is [here](#).
 5. More information about the SHINE project available [here](#).
 6. Download and read the report [here](#).

*Source: Urban Development Secretariat Guide

- **Data plays a very important role in changing the perception of safety in a city at night.** Decision-makers need to ensure that they're asking the right questions and collecting the right information to make useful decisions and communicate what is happening in cities at night. For instance, having the right tools to act in moments of crisis is key to optimizing the use of a city's police and emergency resources.





"The absence of round-the-clock and affordable transportation services is a major issue not only for those who go out, but also for those who work at night."

Nighttime mobility

Nighttime mobility services range from public options, such as fixed-route buses or late-night rail services, to demand-responsive options like private shuttles and transportation network companies (TNCs), for example, Uber and Lyft, that cover areas where ridership is not sufficient to support public transit service. While some cities have more options than others, what they all have in common is that nighttime routes are scarce, less frequent and usually concentrated around central business districts where demand is likely to be higher.

Some takeaways from this session:

- **The absence of round-the-clock and affordable transportation services is a major issue not only for those who go out, but also for those who work at night.** Night-shift workers face many challenges when traveling to and from their jobs, particularly in large metropolitan areas. In recent years, many cities have supported innovative programs to diversify transportation options such as expanding late-night bus and subway service or providing discounted rides at night.
- **Public private partnerships are key to making nighttime mobility sustainable.** Examples include special hubs created by ridesharing companies (sometimes more than one) and cities to promote safety and better mobility in nightlife districts.



Rideshare hub in Downtown Orlando that resulted from a partnership involving Uber, Lyft, the police department and the city's transportation department.

*Rendering of the rideshare Magnolia Hub
Credit: Dominique Greco*



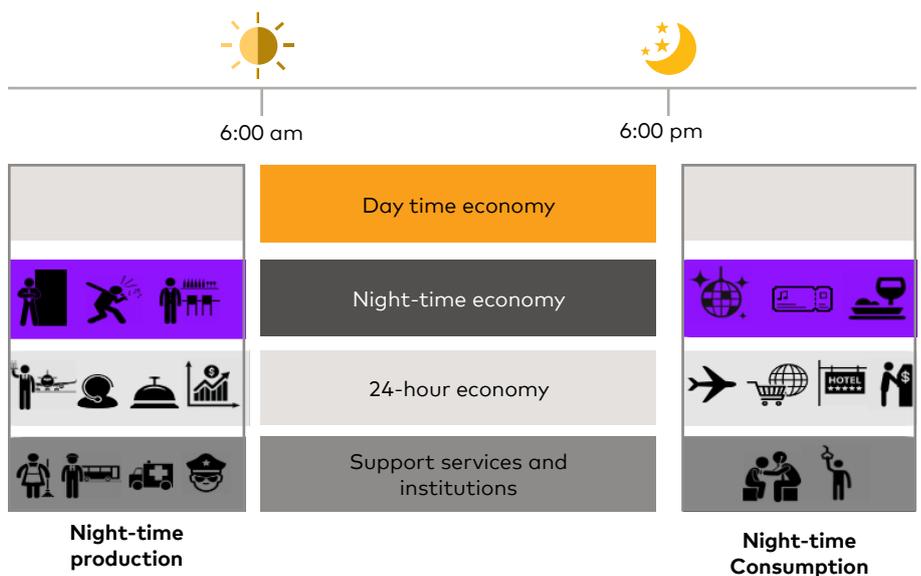
“Encouraging nightlife establishments and services to understand their carbon footprints and planning around them is key to making nighttime economies more sustainable.”

Nighttime economic development

While the nighttime economy refers to productive activities that take place between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., the 24-hour economy refers to a broad variety of support services and institutions that enable the city to function throughout the day.

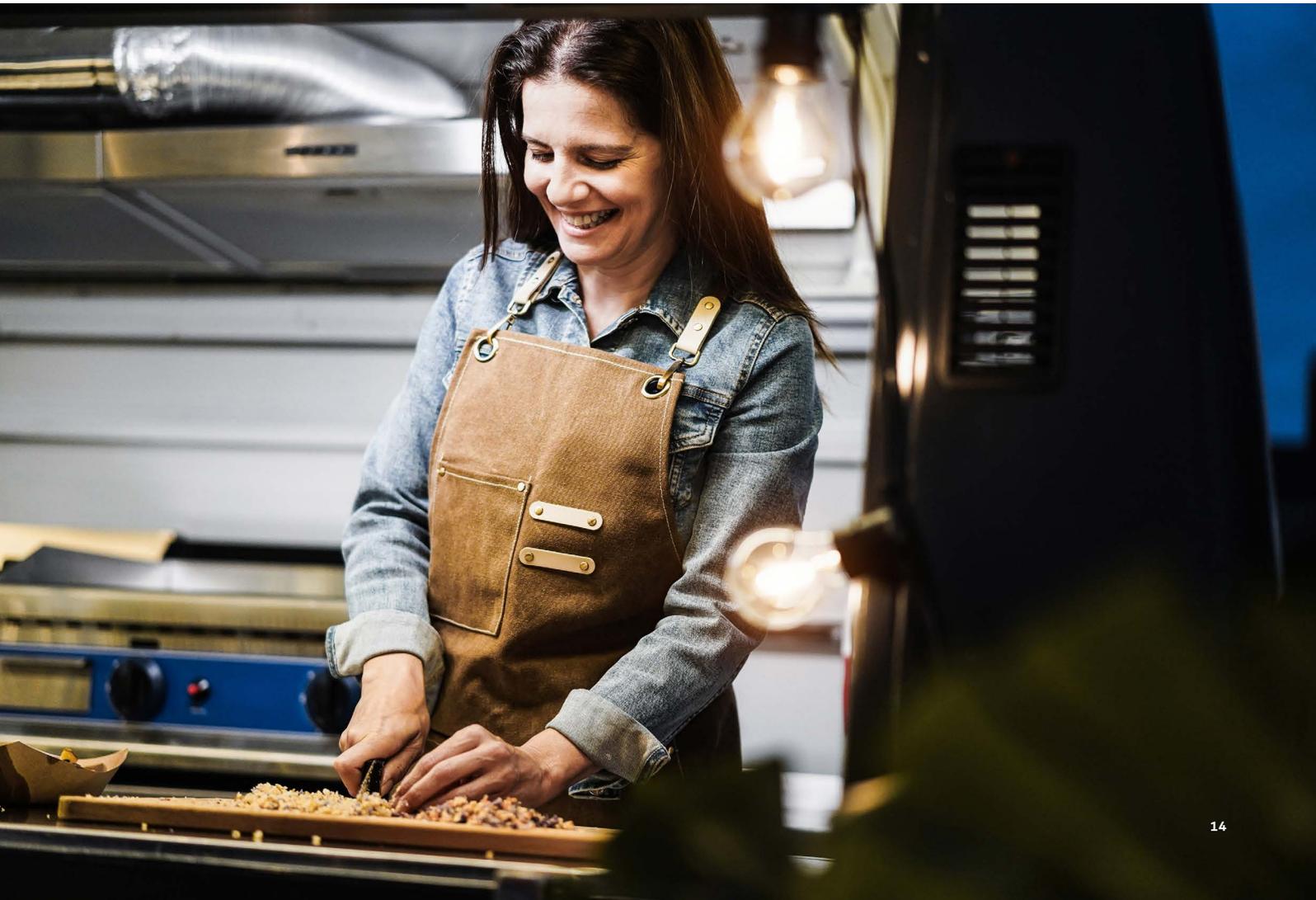
Some takeaways from this session:

- **The nighttime economy is more than leisure and hospitality.** The 24-hour economy includes nightlife businesses such as bars, clubs and music venues, as well as those who work in cleaning, transportation, health and caregiving, logistics, creative industries and other activities that take place after dark.



Source: Seijas, 2020

- **Measuring a city's nighttime economy (NTE) is much more than measuring its economic impact.** Finding an accurate way to measure a city's creative economy is a crucial aspect of understanding the size and contributions of its nighttime economy.
- **The climate crisis does not stop at 6 p.m.** Climate change and sustainability are not often seen as nighttime economy issues. Encouraging nightlife establishments and services (that is, call centers and delivery hubs) to understand their carbon footprints, and measuring and planning around them is key to making the NTE more sustainable.





"One of the greatest challenges in finding the right nighttime governance model for your city is representing all the institutions involved across the board."

Recommendations

The relevance of international platforms such as the 24-Hour Cities Network is that they allow different cities to learn from each other. Regardless of how much progress a city has made, if it already has nighttime strategy or if it is just getting started, these networks are unique spaces to explore what has and hasn't been working, as well as to develop global standards to consolidate the field.

The following section provides a series of recommendations for those cities that wish to embark on a nighttime strategy.

1. Select the governance model that best suits your city

Each city has a unique history and regulatory tradition. For instance, some cities have a strict separation of nightlife uses embedded in their zoning ordinances. Others have more flexibility and don't have curfews or strict hours of operation. What is certain in most cities is that nighttime planning is an iterative process that involves many levels of government: from municipal actors such as neighborhood associations and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), to city-wide institutions such as Metropolitan Authorities, to state-level entities and national entities that influence liquor license distribution and other policies. One of the greatest challenges in finding the right nighttime governance model for your city is representing all the institutions involved across the board.

2. Develop a mechanism to follow up and measure your NTE

Regardless of the governance model selected, each city should ideally have a team responsible for evaluating and monitoring the proposed actions and goals. Some cities have decided to create their own observatory to measure and constantly monitor this information. For instance, London's Night Time Observatory is a data collection project within the framework of the London Datastore or the city's open data portal. This project centralizes geo-referenced information on issues such as the vitality, safety and quality of life of neighborhoods at night, and makes it available to citizens.⁷

7. More information available [here](#).

3. Develop an inventory of your city's nightlife and creative assets

All cities should keep updated geo-referenced inventories of licensed establishments, as well as systematically categorize the types of establishments according to their capacity and economic activity (restaurants, bars, live music establishments, nightclubs and more). A powerful tool to measure and protect local nightlife and culture is the Creative Footprint. Developed by VibeLab, this methodology produces a systematic inventory of a city's cultural activities, the way they are distributed throughout the territory, and the need to update public policies at the local level to strengthen the presence of this sector, which makes major economic, social and cultural contributions. So far, this methodology has been implemented in Berlin, New York, Tokyo, Stockholm and Montreal.

4. Protect your nocturnal heritage

The term "nightlife heritage" refers to the tangible and intangible value that nightlife establishments contribute to the identity, culture and history of a city. Berlin is at the forefront of recognizing and protecting nocturnal heritage. In 2016, the city recognized techno club Berghain as a cultural establishment, securing the same tax status as Berlin concert venues (Oltermann, 2016). In the absence of policies to protect nightlife and cultural establishments and facilitate their preservation, these nighttime spaces are at risk of disappearing in the face of crises, changes in consumer habits and real estate pressures.

Another way to protect existing nightlife venues is to adopt the policy known as the "Agent of Change." This policy implemented by cities like London and San Francisco assigns responsibility for adapting the built environment to the entity responsible for initiating change in the environment. For example, in mixed-use areas where nightclubs are already established, the responsibility and costs of introducing structural changes (such as soundproofing) to incorporate new housing falls in the hands of developers. By recognizing the value of the establishments and not allocating these costs to them, this measure helps protect existing nightlife heritage.

5. Analyse the environmental impact of your city's NTE

There is a great deal of unawareness about the environmental impact of cities' nighttime economy. This responds to the absence of global goals that encourage greater monitoring of waste generation and energy consumption (among other metrics) linked to leisure and entertainment activities.

Some European cities are already making efforts to incorporate sustainable practices into their nighttime economy, in order to distribute their negative externalities, like noise and pollution, both spatially and temporally. Amsterdam, for example, is requesting a detailed plan on the intended uses and scheduling of its nightlife establishments as a requirement to qualify for 24-hour licenses. In addition, these special licenses are managed using spatial criteria, in order to ensure that they are distributed evenly across the city and favoring the granting of these licenses to establishments located outside the historic center (an area characterized by a high density of residents and other licenses).

8. More information about this methodology is available [here](#).

Some other actions that cities can consider taking to manage the environmental impact of their nighttime economy:

- Strategic scheduling of massive activities with a high impact at night, such as major festivals, in order to avoid their concentration in a few months of the year.
- Requesting detailed environmental and social reports as a condition to grant permits for events in public spaces. For example, reports on waste disposal, energy and water consumption during each activity.
- Developing strategies for nighttime reuse of municipal facilities such as libraries, markets and parking lots in order to promote a better use of these spaces throughout the day.
- Encouraging greater nighttime logistic activities in urban areas to facilitate the distribution of goods and services, reduce emissions and manage the vehicle congestion that occurs in the city during the day.



6. Talk to your citizens

Bottom-up approaches are key to creating welcoming nocturnal environments. Using different methods of urban planning, particularly participatory strategies, is crucial in helping different groups feel comfortable and more included in their own spaces and therefore improve their perception of safety during the day and night. Examples of these strategies include charettes or workshops where representatives from resident groups, local authorities, nighttime economy operators and the youth can feel comfortable sharing how they experience their city at night, what are the main challenges and what are the main opportunities. These spaces also foster greater public-private collaboration.



Nighttime business owners (top) and representatives from resident groups (bottom) participate in workshops to discuss a nighttime vision for Barcelona. Source: Andreina Seijas, 2022

7. Raise awareness of the relevance of nighttime management

A city's nightlife continues to be a largely unregulated and stigmatized sector. In order to change this scenario, it is recommended that communication campaigns be undertaken to help raise awareness of the contributions of nightlife in the city among residents, authorities and the private sector:

- **In economic terms:** Number of jobs generated, number of public transport trips and tax revenue linked to the NTE.
- **In social terms:** Initiatives to promote the inclusion of excluded or vulnerable groups and activities that favor community development.
- **In cultural terms:** Average capacity and longevity of cultural venues (that is, years open) and number of establishments designated as nightlife heritage sites.
- **In environmental terms:** Reduction of emissions from nighttime logistics.

8. Promote the permanence of night governance models

Nighttime governance is a relatively young field, which explains why only a few governance models worldwide are of permanent nature. To protect these young institutions from administrative and governmental changes, cities such as New York and London have introduced legislation that establishes the mission, structure and resources associated with these offices. These types of measures are key to guaranteeing the stability of these models in the context of political transitions or crises.

9. Promote the night as a space for experimentation

The recent trend towards more open night scenes is encouraging more cities to embark on pilot tests and temporary interventions. These interventions are a great source of quantitative data about a city's NTE and provide a better picture of how people use and experience life at night. They can also be relatively fast and inexpensive tools to test new models of socialization and productivity after dark, helping guide future policymaking and planning. London's Night Time Enterprise Zones and Mexico City's nighttime bus service Nochebus both began as pilot projects and later evolved into more permanent programs and interventions.

10. Design a nighttime strategy

The main responsibility of a city's nighttime governance model is to design and implement a nighttime strategy. The following table illustrates the elements of a nighttime strategy:

Phase	Objective	Actions	Goals
Positioning	Raise awareness of the need to embark on a nighttime strategy.	Summits, conferences and educational activities.	Identify case studies and best practices locally and internationally.
Nighttime vision	Identify and articulate the needs and interests of different parties involved in managing the city at night.	Participatory dialogue, workshops and charettes.	Identify thematic and spatial priorities, valuable ideas and proposals.
Inventory of nocturnal assets	Update available information on the city's nighttime economy.	Develop georeferenced lists of NTE activities by district.	Interactive map of the city's nightlife and nocturnal heritage inventory.
"Night test"	Analyse if the city's regulations consider the challenges and opportunities of its NTE.	Inventory of liquor licenses, time-based regulations, land use and more.	Update the city's regulations pertaining to its NTE.
Experimentation	Test and evaluate the introduction of new regulations or governance innovations.	Design and implement pilot interventions to test new forms of socialization or productivity at night.	Cost-benefit analysis of these interventions and identify NTE performance indicators.
Dissemination	Communicate the state of the city's NTE and any changes to existing regulations.	Design communication strategies.	Reports, classes, practical guides and education campaigns.



Full list of speakers

Session 1: Governance | April 28, 2022

Ariel Palitz
Executive director, Office of
Nightlife
New York, U.S.A.

Mathieu Grondin
General director
Montreal 24/24
Montreal, Canada

Michele Acuto
Director
Melbourne Centre for Cities and
City of Melbourne Night Time
Economy Advisory Committee
Melbourne, Australia

Session 2: Safety | June 14, 2022

Alessio Kolioulis
Lecturer, University College London
London, U.K.

Mirik Milan
Former night Mayor of Amsterdam
and Founder of VibeLab
Amsterdam, Netherlands

Silvia Chi
Architect
SEDATU (Urban Development
Secretariat)
Mexico City, Mexico

Wilford Pinkney Jr.
Director Mayor's Office of Children,
Youth & Families
St Louis, U.S.A.

John Fimbel
SVP of Business Development
Mastercard
St.Louis, U.S.A.

Session 3: Mobility | September 21, 2022

José Manuel Landin

Former advisor at SEMOVI (Mobility Secretariat) and specialist in Urban Planning and Transportation
Mexico City, Mexico

Mark Curran

Rail closures planning manager and former night tube sponsor
Transport for London
London, U.K.

Dominique Greco

Founder/executive director
Orlando Hospitality Alliance
Orlando, U.S.A.

Sam Baldock

Transit and government partnerships, Eastern U.S., Lyft
New York, U.S.A.

Ben Kemp

Manager, Central Operations:
Mobility Solutions, Uber
Washington D.C., U.S.A.

Mary Riemer

Interim chief of Customer Experience, Metrolink
Los Angeles, U.S.A.

Session 4: Economic development | December 15, 2022

Michael Fichman

Researcher at Penn Praxis and lecturer, University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, U.S.A.

Lutz Leichsenring

Co-founder, VibeLab
Berlin, Germany

Pedro Guedes

General manager
Science, Technology, and Innovation Policies SDECTI
Recife, Brazil

Rayane Aguiar

Senior manager of Strategic Engagement and Sustainability,
Recife Centre Office/Recentro
Recife, Brazil

Carly Heath

Nighttime economy advisor
Bristol, U.K.

Julieta Cuneo

Policy and research officer,
24 Hour London
London, U.K.

Mark Inger

Senior project officer for Night Time Enterprise Zones, 24-Hour London
London, U.K.

Alexandra Lord

Director
Mastercard Economic Institute,
Mastercard
New York, U.S.A.

References

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Oltermann, P (2016, September 12) High culture club: Berghain secures same tax status as Berlin concert venues. [The Guardian](#).

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Vienna Club Commission (2020). COVID-19. [Instagram](#).

Other resources

The following is a list of resources related to the 24-Hour Cities Network for those interested in learning more about how to manage cities after dark:

Insight reports from all the 24-Hour Cities Network sessions, available [here](#).

[Acuto, M et al \(2021\) Managing Cities at Night: A Practitioner Guide to the Urban Governance of the Night-Time Economy.](#)

[Acuto, M et al \(2023\) Meeting afterhours: on the work that night commissions do, Urban Geography.](#)

[Connected Cities Lab \(2021\) Cities After Dark Podcast.](#)

[Seijas, A & Sound Diplomacy \(2018\). A guide to managing your night-time economy. Sound Diplomacy: London.](#)

[Shaheen, S and Cohen, A \(2019\) Late-Night Transportation: How Two Public Agencies Are Filling Service Gaps Through Mobility on Demand.](#)

[Vibelab, Creative Footprint Reports](#)

[Vibelab, Global Nighttime Recovery Plan](#)

About the author

Andreina Seijas is a Venezuelan researcher and international consultant. She currently works as Associate at Gehl and leads research on urban governance at the Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC). After completing her doctoral studies in nighttime planning and governance at the Harvard School of Design, Andreina founded Night Tank, a firm specialized in this novel field. Previously, Andreina worked as a senior consultant for IdenCity in Barcelona; as a consultant for the Housing and Urban Development Division at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in Washington D.C.; as a policy associate at the Council of the Americas in New York City; and as information manager for the municipality of Chacao in Caracas, Venezuela. Andreina has a Communications degree from Universidad Catolica Andres Bello, an M. Sc. in Social Policy and Development from the London School of Economics, a master's in public administration and non-profit management from New York University, and a Doctor of Design (DDes) degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design.



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